



Special National Intelligence Estimate

Gorbachev's Policy Toward the United States, 1986-88

Key Judgments

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22 SEP 1986

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for the Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

~~Secret~~

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THE NATIONAL FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE BOARD CONCURS, EXCEPT AS NOTED IN THE TEXT.

The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of the Estimate:

The Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, the Treasury, and Energy.

Also Participating:

The Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army

The Director of Naval Intelligence, Department of the Navy

The Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, Department of the Air Force

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**GORBACHEV'S POLICY TOWARD
THE UNITED STATES, 1986-88**

KEY JUDGMENTS

The full text of this Estimate
is being published separately
with regular distribution.

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SCOPE NOTE

This Special National Intelligence Estimate assesses the policies of the Gorbachev regime toward the United States during the period 1986 through 1988, the remaining term of the current US administration. This Estimate was stimulated in part by interest in the degree to which Soviet domestic economic conditions encourage accommodation with the United States on key security issues. The Estimate discusses Gorbachev's broader foreign policy aims primarily as they affect US-Soviet relations and does not attempt an exhaustive analysis of Soviet foreign policy in all areas.

Section II summarizes our assessment of current Soviet economic, military, and overall foreign policies and their prospects, Gorbachev's internal political position, and the bearing of these factors on Soviet policy toward the United States in the next two years. Section III gives our assessment of current Soviet policy toward the United States and the calculations shaping it. Section IV presents conclusions and the outlook for the next two years.

The discussion in Section IV rests largely on the assumption that US policies and positions with respect to arms control and regional security issues remain substantially constant. We have not attempted comprehensively to hypothesize the impact of alternative US policies.

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KEY JUDGMENTS

The Gorbachev regime aims to re-create some sort of detente relationship with the United States to ease the burden of arms competition and, accordingly, the task of domestic economic revival. Because the detente they seek reduces US challenges to Soviet interests, Soviet leaders believe such a relationship can help preserve and advance the USSR's international influence and its relative military power. Gorbachev seeks to relax East-West hostility for a protracted period—he is looking ahead through the 1990s—not to suspend the competition but to put the USSR in an improved long-term position as a globally influential superpower.

These aims have persuaded the Soviets to pursue an active, engaged policy toward the United States. It is focused on arms control (supported by a vigorous worldwide propaganda offensive) and on the prospect of US-Soviet summits (exploited for leverage to moderate US policies and encourage concessions on arms control). The Soviets strive to deflect the Reagan administration away from security policies that, despite some moderation in the last two years, the Soviets see as severely challenging to them and to discourage such hostile US policies from being carried forward into the next US administration.

The Soviets realize, however, that their engaged policy toward the United States risks legitimizing hostile policies of the current administration by muting Western anxieties about them and seeming to show that they are a sound basis for dealing with Moscow. Managing this risk is a delicate problem for the new Soviet leadership. There are differing points of view in Moscow about how to craft a diplomacy sufficiently forthcoming to encourage US concessions while minimizing this risk. Despite such controversies, we believe Gorbachev has the political strength to forge Politburo consensus behind the initiatives and decisions he favors in dealing with the United States.

The central Soviet objective in bilateral dealings with the United States and in the surrounding Soviet diplomacy and propaganda toward US Allies and Western publics is revival of the arms control framework of the 1970s or creation of a similar successor system. The Soviets see such a framework as serving their political, military, and economic interests. It would provide an important element of predictability that would ease the balancing of military requirements and economic revitalization in the 1990s. And, should its political side effects include a flagging of overall US defense efforts such as occurred in the mid-1970s,

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so much the better. Gorbachev is more prepared than his predecessors to consider substantial reductions of offensive nuclear forces in such a framework for reasons that include cost avoidance, increasing interest in enhancing the quality of Soviet nonnuclear forces, and a desire to undermine the credibility of US nuclear strategies. The main Soviet motive for considering and negotiating about large nuclear force reductions at present is to undermine the US strategic defense initiative (SDI).

To be acceptable to the Soviets, a comprehensive strategic arms control framework that includes substantial reductions of offensive nuclear forces must provide effective constraints on the US SDI, through formal agreement that limits the program and political effects that they calculate would kill it eventually. Despite its uncertain future, the Soviets are deeply concerned about SDI because it might produce a military and technological revolution and could undermine the war-fighting strategies of Soviet nuclear forces. In the extreme, the Soviets genuinely fear that SDI could give the US confidence it had a damage-limiting first-strike capability. To be in a position to counter SDI, the Soviets believe they must preserve large ballistic missile forces and the option to expand them. For both economic and military reasons, they wish to avoid the costs of a competition to develop and counter advanced ballistic missile defenses in which the United States has the technological initiative. Their campaign against SDI aims to deny the United States that initiative; but they will proceed to develop advanced defense technologies in any event, as they did following the ABM Treaty of 1972.

Despite the seriousness of Soviet economic difficulties and the longer term importance to Moscow of easing East-West tensions to help address them, we believe that these difficulties do not place Gorbachev under so much pressure that he must make fundamental concessions to the United States on major security issues during the next two years. Gorbachev believes he can hold out for an arms control framework and a larger US-Soviet security relationship generally on his terms, while putting political pressures on Washington to make key concessions, particularly on SDI.¹

Gorbachev believes that only a diplomacy appearing flexible to American and European audiences, especially on arms control, can put pressure on Washington and test the possibilities that may exist for real US concessions. More innovations in Soviet arms control positions of the sort Gorbachev has already introduced are likely if he believes they can

¹ The Director, Defense Intelligence Agency holds that the opening clause of this paragraph overstates the role of Soviet economic conditions in causing the Soviets to pursue detente in any time frame, and that strategic and political considerations are overriding. See paragraph 4 of "Discussion" for a fuller statement of this view.

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help him achieve constraints on SDI and other US defense programs. New unilateral gestures, such as modest cuts in military manpower or in the officially stated defense budget, are possible.

At the same time, Gorbachev sees himself able to defend Soviet interests in the Third World, particularly with regard to embattled Marxist-Leninist client states. He expects a more active Soviet foreign policy overall to open up new opportunities in the Third World and among US Allies.

Soviet policy toward the United States involves two principal tactics: first, holding open the promise of nuclear force reductions if the United States accommodates on SDI; second, holding open the prospect of a series of additional summits if the United States gives ground on arms control. If the United States makes the concessions necessary for this process to proceed, Gorbachev believes that it will serve the political goals of weakening anti-Soviet policies in Washington or encouraging more congenial behavior from the next US administration. Gorbachev sees the popularity of arms control in the United States and Europe and domestic disquiet over the administration's foreign and defense policies as his main source of influence over Washington and Washington's eagerness for summits as his principal point of tactical leverage.

To maximize his leverage, Gorbachev will delay his decision on scheduling another summit as long as possible. All things being equal, Gorbachev would profit politically from additional summits. But we believe he will hold out for terms that advance Soviet political and strategic interests; he does not need a summit for its own sake. Some US movement on SDI, particularly acceptance of the principle that control of space-based strategic defenses should be dealt with by reaffirming the ABM Treaty and modifying its withdrawal clause, plus US delay in actually breaching the SALT limits and convergence on another arms control issue, such as nuclear testing or INF, would be enough to bring Gorbachev to another summit. We are simply uncertain whether Gorbachev will come short of these conditions.

Meeting these conditions and holding another US-Soviet summit would not, however, produce Soviet agreement to a comprehensive arms control package on nuclear force reductions. For such an agreement, we believe the Soviets will demand codification in some form of the principle that offensive strategic force reductions must go hand in hand with tight constraints on SDI. By the same token, we believe the Soviets will strongly resist principles and agreement terms that seem to license SDI by reconciling its development and deployment with nuclear force reductions.

Failing agreement along Soviet-preferred lines or publicly visible progress toward it, we believe that Gorbachev is likely at some point to shift his priorities and tactics toward a more concerted effort to discredit the policies of the current US administration, to inject East-West issues into the 1988 Presidential election, and to encourage more

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flexibility from the next US administration. Such a shift would involve harsher propaganda attacks on the administration and the President and stand-pat negotiating tactics, although not a Soviet withdrawal from arms control negotiations or other fundamental changes of behavior. Moscow would continue to position itself to appear the party eager for improved US-Soviet relations, while trying even harder to portray the administration as the recalcitrant side. There is some basis for arguing that this shift has already taken place, but we think this is unlikely and would look for it sometime in late 1987 or early 1988.

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